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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Joint statement of EU Ministers for Justice and Home Affairs and representatives of EU institutions on the terrorist attacks in Brussels on 22 March 2016

Delegations will find attached the Joint statement of EU Ministers for Justice and Home Affairs and representatives of EU institutions on the terrorist attacks in Brussels on 22 March 2016, adopted on 24 March 2016 in Brussels.

ANNEX

Joint statement of EU Ministers for Justice and Home Affairs and representatives of EU institutions on the terrorist attacks in Brussels on 22 March 2016

We express our shock at the attacks in Brussels on 22 March 2016. We are appalled by these horrific terrorist acts, which we strongly condemn. We extend our deepest sympathy and condolences to the victims of these attacks, their families and friends. We express our support and solidarity to Belgium, its people and the city of Brussels in particular. We stand determined in our common fight against terrorism. As stated by the Heads of State or Government and the leaders of European institutions, this is an attack on our open, democratic society. We will uphold our values also in fighting terrorism.

Today, we heard from the Belgian authorities how they are facing this crisis and discussed what is to be learned from recurrent patterns in terrorist attacks and supporting networks.

In the light of these events, and recognising the substantial progress already made at Member State and EU level to enhance our collective ability to combat terrorism, Ministers are convinced of the need to:

1. further build upon the combined national efforts to investigate, as a matter of urgency, the networks involved in the Paris and Brussels attacks and other similar networks.

2. adopt the PNR directive in April 2016 and implement it as a matter of urgency, thereby ensuring that passenger information units (PIUs) exchange data between them as soon as possible.

3. pursue ongoing work in a resolute manner: swift completion of legislation on combatting terrorism, on systematic checks at external borders of the Schengen area, on control of the acquisition and possession of firearms, on the extension of the European Criminal Records Information System (ECRIS) to third country nationals; implementation of the action plan to fight terrorism financing; fight against document fraud and full implementation of existing EU rules on explosive precursors; and further cooperation in counter terrorism between the European Union and Turkey and the countries of North Africa, the Middle East and the Western Balkans.

4. share information with transport authorities and operators as appropriate, so that risk assessments can be conducted in an effective and efficient manner, and mitigating measures can be adapted as necessary to potential threats to transport.

5. increase as a matter of urgency the systematic feeding, consistent use and interoperability of European and international databases in the fields of security, travel and migration by making full use of technological developments and including privacy safeguards from the outset. This is particularly relevant for reliable identity verification. The Commission will present in the coming weeks a communication on smart borders and interoperability. In this context, work should be accelerated on the development of a European wide automated fingerprint recognition system integrated into the Schengen Information System (SIS). The EU Counter Terrorism Coordinator, the Presidency, the Commission, relevant agencies and experts will join forces to present by June 2016 concrete deliverables, in particular to improve the collecting, checking and connecting of information in the field of counter terrorism.

6. find ways, as a matter of priority, to secure and obtain more quickly and effectively digital evidence, by intensifying cooperation with third countries and with service providers that are active on European territory, in order to enhance compliance with EU and Member States' legislation and direct contacts with law enforcement authorities. The Council meeting in June will identify concrete measures to address this complex matter.

7. continue to develop effective preventive measures, especially by improving early detection of signs of radicalization at local level and by countering the rhetoric of *Daesh* in particular through communication strategies and the development of robust rehabilitation programmes. The Radicalization Awareness Network and the Strategic Communications Network will further enhance their support to practitioners, civil society and Member States in this regard. The Commission will intensify work with IT companies, notably in the EU Internet Forum, to counter terrorist propaganda and to develop by June 2016 a code of conduct against hate speech online.

8. fully support the work of the Counter Terrorism Group (CTG), in particular by further accelerating the establishment of a dedicated platform for real time, multilateral information exchange.

9. use more regularly Joint Investigation Teams, which have demonstrated their usefulness after the attacks in Paris, to coordinate investigations and gather and exchange evidence.

10. set up a joint liaison team of national counter-terrorism experts at Europol's European Counter Terrorism Centre (ECTC) to support the Member States' law enforcement authorities in investigating the wider European and international dimensions of the current terrorist threat, to which Member States are invited to second experts. This team will draw on Europol’s law enforcement capabilities to monitor the threat from foreign fighters, the flows of terrorist financing and illegal firearms, and online propaganda.